

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)

The Definition of Love

1My love is of a birth as rare
2As 'tis for object strange and high;
3It was begotten by Despair
4Upon Impossibility.

5Magnanimous Despair alone
6Could show me so divine a thing
7Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown,
8But vainly flapp'd its tinsel wing.

9And yet I quickly might arrive
10Where my extended soul is fixt,
11But Fate does iron wedges drive,
12And always crowds itself betwixt.

13For Fate with jealous eye does see
14Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;
15Their union would her ruin be,
16And her tyrannic pow'r depose.

17And therefore her decrees of steel
18Us as the distant poles have plac'd,
19(Though love's whole world on us doth wheel)
20Not by themselves to be embrac'd;

21Unless the giddy heaven fall,
22And earth some new convulsion tear;
23And, us to join, the world should all
24Be cramp'd into a planisphere.

25As lines, so loves oblique may well
26Themselves in every angle greet;
27But ours so truly parallel,
28Though infinite, can never meet.

29Therefore the love which us doth bind,
30But Fate so enviously debars,
31Is the conjunction of the mind,
32And opposition of the stars.

Henry Vaughan (1622?-1695)

The Retreat

1Happy those early days, when I
2Shin'd in my angel-infancy!
3Before I understood this place
4Appointed for my second race,
5Or taught my soul to fancy ought
6But a white, celestial thought;
7When yet I had not walk'd above
8A mile or two from my first love,
9And looking back (at that short space)
10Could see a glimpse of his bright face;
11When on some gilded cloud or flow'r
12My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
13And in those weaker glories spy
14Some shadows of eternity;
15Before I taught my tongue to wound
16My conscience with a sinful sound,
17Or had the black art to dispense,
18A sev'ral sin to ev'ry sense,
19But felt through all this fleshly dress
20Bright shoots of everlastingness.

21 O how I long to travel back,
22And tread again that ancient track!
23That I might once more reach that plain,
24Where first I left my glorious train,
25From whence th' enlighten'd spirit sees
26That shady city of palm trees.
27But ah! my soul with too much stay
28Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
29Some men a forward motion love,
30But I by backward steps would move;
31And when this dust falls to the urn,
32In that state I came, return.

George Herbert (1593-1633)

The Collar

1I struck the board, and cried, "No more!
2 I will abroad.
3What! shall I ever sigh and pine?
4My lines and life are free; free as the road,
5 Loose as the wind, as large as store.
6 Shall I be still in suit?
7 Have I no harvest but a thorn
8 To let me blood, and not restore
9What I have lost with cordial fruit?
10 Sure there was wine
11 Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
12 Before my tears did drown it.
13 Is the year only lost to me?
14 Have I no bays to crown it?
15No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
16 All wasted?
17 Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
18 And thou hast hands.
19 Recover all thy sigh-blown age
20On double pleasures; leave thy cold dispute
21Of what is fit and not; forsake thy cage,
22 Thy rope of sands,
23Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
24 Good cable, to enforce and draw,
25 And be thy law,
26 While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
27 Away! take heed;
28 I will abroad.
29Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;
30 He that forbears
31 To suit and serve his need
32 Deserves his load."
33But as I rav'd, and grew more fierce and wild
34 At every word,
35 Me thoughts I heard one calling, "Child";
36 And I replied, "My Lord."

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Easter Wings

1 Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
2 Though foolishly he lost the same,
3 Decaying more and more,
4 Till he became
5 Most poore:
6 With thee
7 O let me rise
8 As larks, harmoniously,
9 And sing this day thy victories:
10 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

11 My tender age in sorrow did beginne
12 And still with sicknesses and shame.
13 Thou didst so punish sinne,
14 That I became
15 Most thinne.
16 With thee
17 Let me combine,
18 And feel thy victorie:
19 For, if I imp my wing on thine,
20 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.